R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 016 738 UD 005 327

SUCCESS FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN.

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PUB DATE OCT 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.48 10P.

DESCRIPTORS- *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, *BEGINNING READING, *READING MATERIALS, *READING ACHIEVEMENT, *READING INSTRUCTION, ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, READING TESTS INDIVIDUAL READING, PACING, PARENT PARTICIPATION, EXPERIENCE CHARTS, HOMEWORK, RECORDS (FORMS), NEW YORK CITY, HARLEM, PS 129, NEW YORK TESTS OF GROWTH IN READING, METROPOLITAN ACHIEVEMENT TEST, HARRIS SAMPLE GRADED WORD LIST, BEGINNING READING CLASS PROFILE

THE SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS OF A BEGINNING READING PROGRAM IN A HARLEM (NEW YORK CITY) ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ARE DISCUSSED. INDIVIDUAL PACING OF INSTRUCTION, ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF INDEPENDENT STUDY SKILLS, PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT OF EACH CHILD, AND FREQUENT STUDENT EVALUATION ARE INTRINSIC TO THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PROGRAM. INITIAL READING ACTIVITIES INVOLVE THE USE OF WORK CHARTS WHICH RECORD DAILY CLASS ACTIVITIES AND OF CHILDREN'S "EXPERIENCE STORIES" WHICH THE TEACHER COPIES ON THE BLACKBOARD AND REXOGRAPHS. EACH CHILD IS GIVEN BOOKS AND WORKSHEETS APPROPRIATE TO HIS READING LEVEL AND IS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR RECORDING HIS OWN PROGRESS. SILENT READING, ESSENTIAL TO THE PROGRAM'S INDIVIDUAL PACING TECHNIQUE, IS ENCOURAGED. TO INSURE THEIR INVOLVEMENT, PARENTS ARE ASKED TO SIGN THE CHILD'S READING HOMEWORK SLIP DAILY. THE STUDENTS' PROGRESS IS FORMALLY EVALUATED BY TEACHER RATINGS AND PROGRESS RECORDS, GRADED WORD LIST TESTS, AND STANDARDIZED TESTS. ACCORDING TO THE REPORTED TEST RESULTS, THE PROGRAM HAS CONSISTENTLY IMPROVED THE READING ABILITY OF PARTICIPATING STUDENTS. TABULAR DATA ON ACHIEVEMENT TEST RESULTS ARE GIVEN. THIS ARTICLE IS A REPRINT FROM "THE READING TEACHER," VOLUME 21, NUMBER 1, OCTOBER 1967. (LB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Success for disadvantaged children

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Introduction

THE QUESTION OF WHAT constitutes a good beginning reading program is of particular concern to those who work in disadvantaged areas. The beginning reading program described in this article has been successful for several years (1962 to date) in developing reading competence among disadvantaged children at the John H. Finley School located in a low-income area of New York City. The report discusses the philosophy and goals of the Finley program, some of the materials and procedures through which it is implemented, and the results of evaluation measures.

A sense of personal involvement and the need to experience success are deemed particularly important for children of a deprived socio-economic background. The cornerstone of the Finley program is a careful system of individual pacing of instruction designed to allow each child to be involved according to his developing ability and to build a positive image of himself as a successful learner. The program emphasizes the development of independence in reading and study skills and of a sense of responsibility for learning. The involvement of parents is an integral part of the program so that the child feels he has support from the home.

The salient features of the program stated here briefly are elaborated in the sections that follow. There is intensive emphasis on oral language development based on daily classroom activities, involving each child individually. Initial reading activities are introduced and reading skills are developed through carefully structured and controlled work charts and experience stories which have immediate personal meaning for the children. Children are tested regularly and are supplied with books appropriate to their level of reading ability. The school maintains a large selection of trade books and readers classified according to a sequence of difficulty levels developed in this school. Horizontal reenforcement (reading of many books at any one level) is provided to the extent that each child needs this before moving to a higher level. Independence

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in reading and study skills is encouraged a] by seeing that the child gets books that he can read silently with comprehension and enjoyment; b] by providing worksheets for specific books with questions to be answered; and c] by having the child take responsibility for record-keeping that dramatizes his reading progress and stimulates him to further effort. Reading homework is a serious part of the program, starting as soon as the child receives his first experience story on the first day of school. Parent involvement is encouraged through having parents check the child's reading at home and by providing conferences and demonstrations for parents at school. Extensive evaluation is built into the program to provide the detailed knowledge of each child's current status which is needed for careful pacing. Teachers' ratings and records of progress, graded word list tests at frequent intervals and standardized tests are used.

The program does not rely upon any single theory or method of beginning reading instruction—linguistic, language experience, sight, phonic-word, basal or individualized; the approach is pragmatic and eclectic. However, the close and continuous evaluation of each child's reading progress and the pacing of materials and activities to develop each child's pattern of reading growth and language development necessitate training, supervision and cooperation of the teaching staff. The program is concerned with ways of changing teachers' attitudes and classroom procedures with respect to the so-called "slow learners" and "discipline problems" in order to build a classroom climate that fosters success.

It should be pointed out that the philosophy and approach of the Finley program need not be limited to the instruction of children from disadvantaged areas. In fact, the program was developed in a middle-class school, although it has been applied most extensively in a depressed urban setting and meets the particular challenges that such a situation contains. The neighborhood in northwest Harlem where the Finley school is located is typical of city tenement areas. The school includes six grades with 1100 students of whom approximately 89 per cent are Negro and 10 per cent Puerto Rican.

For analysis, different facets of the program are discussed separately in this report. The program operates most intensively in the first grade, but the principles of pacing, sequence and evaluation are applied throughout the primary grades and into the upper grades as well.

Reading materials and procedures

At the beginning of first grade, "reading" is introduced through the use of work charts and experience stories. The work charts focus on beginning reading skills and are used from the first day of school. Several types of work charts appear in each classroom and serve as a

means of recording the planning and organization of the daily activities of the class. There are charts for recording attendance, duties of helpers, special news, weather, calendar, pledge to the flag, and the assignments in the work-play period. The charts are designed with slots into which children insert prepared strips with the appropriate responses—their names, a word or phrase, or a numeral or picture. Thus word, phrase, sentence, and later paragraph comprehension, word-attack skills, and work-study skills are introduced through the reading of work charts under the direction of the teacher or a pupil helper.

The experience stories, elicited from the children by the teacher, also provide a vehicle for teaching beginning reading skills. The stories are highly personal, repeat children's names, and focus on the immediate and familiar. The story is recorded on the chalkboard by the teacher. The vocabulary of the stories is controlled and is gradually extended as activities are engaged in which broaden the children's experiential background and concepts. Each child maintains his own "experience story reader" by pasting rexographed copies of the stories in a hard-covered notebook. Pictures enliven the text and serve as reading clues. Later in the year, as handwriting skills develop, the copying of the story affords directed practice in penmanship.

Changes in the work charts and experience stories reflect progress of the children in reading. Increasingly complex vocabulary and language tasks are used in the workcharts; a prescribed sequence of structured, meaningful language patterns, first oral and then written is followed. In addition to providing successful reading experiences, the materials are designed to extend concepts, promote growth in oral language, and interrelate learnings in all the curriculum areas.

Language games and differentiated techniques are planned for the children who make slower progress. Constant use is made of the chalkboard and of individual slates for the development of oral and written language and for practice in word perception skills. The decision to introduce trade and text books is made for each child individually, based on detailed observations by his teacher and the director. The work charts and experience stories are used as a frame of reference to help the child recognize and recall familiar sight words when he meets them in the unfamiliar context of the printed book.

The introduction of book reading in grade one, as well as the number and level of difficulty of books read, is tailored to each child's progress. A variety of trade and text books is used, following a sequence developed in the school. A classification of approximately three hundred different titles, ranging from the first pre-primer through second reader level and higher has been prepared and is constantly refined. The designated levels do not always follow publishers' recommendations but are based on experience in using the books with the children in the Finley School. For example, *Laugh with Larry,* in the pre-primer three cate-

gory of the Detroit integrated series, is read with ease in the Finley pre-primer one sequence. On the other hand, in the Bank Street integrated series, *In the City* is classified as a first pre-primer and *People Read* as a second pre-primer. Both books are read in the Finley pre-primer two sequence. Also many other titles are available in class libraries for individual reading or use with small groups.

Children are not hurried from one level of difficulty to another. Some need slow pacing and exposure to many books at one level; others may be paced more rapidly. For example, at pre-primer one level, thirteen texts are available. One child may not need to spend any time with books at this level; another child may take a few days; still another may remain at this level for as long as a year.

Silent reading is encouraged from the start by having each child read a book he can handle independently. Faster-moving children act as "buddies" to help slower classmates with specific word recognition problems. Teachers meet with small groups or individuals who need further development of reading skills and reinforcement through additional reading of workcharts and experience stories, while the others engage in silent independent reading and other language experiences.

In the second grade, children are grouped on the basis of their progress in reading. From this point, the pacing is done by classes rather than for individuals, using the same principles of fitting the level of books to reading ability of the child and providing horizontal reinforcement. It should be stressed, however, that class organization lines are fluid and that children are frequently shifted during the year as their reading performance warrants.

To document the pacing of reading instruction, the records of the number and levels of books read by the second grade classes in 1964-1965 and 1965-1966 were examined and are summarized in Table 1. The books read included readers, social studies and science texts, and trade books classified at varying levels of difficulty.

It can be seen that in each class the children read many books during a school year, a striking contrast to situations in which several basal readers constitute the reading fare for the year. Moreover, the difficulty level of these books was differentiated according to the reading ability of the class. Thus, while a low-achieving class may have read many pre-primers and primers, a more advanced class would have omitted these levels and read more books at the higher levels.

It should also be noted that the record for 1965-1966 shows progress over 1964-1965 in that the second grade classes read more books than in the previous year, an average of sixty-eight books in 1965-1966 and sixty books in 1964-1965. There are, of course, variations from class to class attributable to differences in experience of teachers with the program. Further, the increase in books read was seen chiefly at the higher levels of difficulty, indicating that the program in both first

and second grades has become increasingly effective. It will be seen in Table 2 that this progress is also reflected in standardized test results.

Table 1 Number of books read at each level of difficulty by grade two classes of differing achievement in academic years ending June 1965 and June 1966

Difficulty Level—Finley Program	*Number of Books Read by the Children in Each Class									
	2-1†		2-2		2-3		2-4		2-5	
	'65	'66	'65	'66	'65	'66	'65	'66	'65	'66
Pre-Primer 1	13	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Pre-Primer 2	9	—	9	—	8	—	—	—	—	—
Pre-Primer 3	16	16	16	10	17	6	3	—	—	—
Primer	4	7	7	7	7	7	4	4	—	—
Trade Book—List A	7	11	10	11	8	11	8	11	—	—
First Reader	—	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	3	4
Trade Book—List B	—	14	4	15	18	19	23	22	20	25
Social Studies (First Reader)	1	3	1	2	3	3	2	2	4	3
Science (First Reader)	2	4	2	4	1	2	2	6	4	6
Second Reader	—	1	1	6	5	2	9	12	12	12
Social Studies (Second Reader)	—	—	—	3	—	3	1	8	12	12
Science (Second Reader)	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	7	—	14
Total Number	52	62	60	64	74	59	57	78	55	76

*Each of these books was available in class sets with a copy distributed to each child in the class.
†2-1 is the class with the lowest reading ability; 2-5 is the highest.

At the beginning of the year, teachers in each grade hold planning conferences with the director to implement the total program. Classroom demonstrations are given to show specific techniques and emphases. Group and individual teacher conferences follow the demonstrations, so that an immediate opportunity is afforded to discuss techniques and to provide for questioning and appraisal of the principles involved.

Worksheets and records

In keeping with the program's emphasis upon early development of independence in learning and of good work habits and study skills, special worksheets which test comprehension have been devised by the director of the program and are introduced with the beginning of book reading. At first, only multiple-choice or "yes-no" responses, involving circling the answer, are called for. As the child learns to write, more challenging responses are elicited. Correction sheets are provided. The teacher or the director studies the child's responses and, in a group or individual meeting with the child, ascertains the cause of any difficulty. Individual conferences are held several times a week with all chil-

dren to check on word recognition of the vocabulary of their silent reading homework assignments. Children are taught self-study techniques for recall of the isolated words in the vocabulary list. The vocabulary check always follows the reading of the text, with the children encouraged to refer back to the context when they do not recall a word in the list.

Class and individual record-keeping forms, as well as individual folders of each child's work, are considered essential in this program. The record forms have been designed to provide the primary grade teachers with a perpetual inventory of each child's progress and to facilitate articulation from grade to grade. These same forms help the director of the program form ability groups for team teaching sessions, for instruction in specific reading skills, for the sharing and enjoyment of a particular book or story, as well as for the individual pacing of books. From the very start, the child learns the importance of records by participating in and recording workchart activities.

Homework and parent involvement

Communication with the home is maintained through the children's daily home assignments and through letters, conferences, and interviews. Specified reading homework is assigned to each child in accordance with his reading level so that he is able to do his reading homework independently. The parent is encouraged to help by 1] seeing that the child has a quiet place where he can read silently to himself; 2] seeing that the child checks the words in the vocabulary at the end of the book and then repeats them to the parent; and 3] signing the child's reading homework slip each day. A form is enclosed in each book the child takes home, indicating pages to be read, words to check and a place for the parent's signature. Subsequent letters keep the parent informed of the child's progress and suggest additional supportive home activities such as a trip to story hour in the neighborhood library. Library visits are considered important, and 100 per cent membership in the public library is achieved by most classes.

Class and individual instructional conferences are held with the parents to show them specifically how they can help and to explain the differences in children's reading performance. The need for approbation and support of the child, whether the child's initial response to reading be quick or slow, is stressed. Demonstrations of "home-study" practices are given to parents and to older siblings. No child is left to struggle alone. An attempt is made to maintain close home-school contacts even during school vacations.

In order to ascertain the extent to which parents were cooperating in supervising homework, an examination was made of letters and slips which children were asked to have signed at home for assignments. It

should be noted that for the individually paced children in grade one, this entailed specific homework adapted to each child's level in the particular book he was then reading. The first graders also had review assignments in their "experience story" notebooks and Weekly Readers.

In the first grade classes, heterogeneously grouped, 85 per cent of the parents signed the letter and 76 per cent signed the silent reading record which involved a signature for each day's assignment slip. In grade two, 91 per cent of the parents signed the letter and 89 per cent signed the reading assignment record. The parent response in grade two did not vary systematically with the ability level of the class. The above percentages indicate that most of the parents complied with the school request. (Thus, though it is often stated that parents in lower socio-economic areas are apathetic in response to school overtures, Finley parents have been cooperative and involved.)

Methods of evaluation

Evaluation of each child's growth in language, in reading, and in social behavior begins on the first day of school. A Beginning Reading Class Profile, devised by the director, assesses the pupil's ability on a four-point scale. Highest on the scale are those children who contribute sentences to be recorded in the experience stories and workcharts, who recall sentences after an interval, and who recognize words instantly. Lowest on the scale are those who have difficulty repeating sentences and who are unable to match words. The scale also provides space for notations, such as "parent does not regularly sign homework." Problems (behavior, foreign language, excessive lateness or absence) are also noted so that appropriate measures for improvement may be taken by the school nurse, teacher, parent, director, guidance counselor, or principal.

The child's standing on the Beginning Reading Profile scale is the first formal record of his reading growth. In addition, the Finley adaptation of the *Harris Sample Graded Word List* (1961) is administered once a month to each child in grade one and every six weeks to each child in grade two to evaluate growth in word recognition. The school has prefaced the test with a list of words at the experiential level based on the workcharts used daily. The child's scores on his worksheets are a continuing evaluative measure.

The *New York Tests of Growth in Reading* (1947, 1948) have been given at the end of each year in grades one and two. In 1966, the children in grade two were also given the *Metropolitan Achievement Test* (1966) as part of a city-wide testing program instituted by the Board of Education. These standardized tests, however, are not the only criteria used for placing a child or appraising his ability. The judgment of the teacher and of the director, based on observation of the child's daily

performance, analysis of his standing on the class profile, his results on the Harris Test and conferences with the parent are also used in pacing instruction.

The standardized tests do provide a formal measure of the progress of the children in the reading program and enable comparisons to be made with established norms. Table 2 presents grade equivalent quartile scores on the *New York Tests of Growth in Reading, A* and *B,* for grades one and two from 1963 to 1966. It should be noted that before the present program was initiated fewer than half of the children in grade one were judged able to participate in the testing. From the first year of this program (1962-1963), all children have been tested in grade one as in other grades.

Table 2 Results of New York tests of growth in reading given at end of grades 1 and 2 (1963-1966)

	Grade Equivalent Quartiles			
	Q_1	Median	Q_3	Range
Grade 1 – Test A (ceiling 3.5)				
(Time of Testing: 1.9)				
1963 (N=154)	1.9	2.2	2.6	(0.0-3.5)
1964 (N=154)	1.9	2.3	2.7	(0.0-3.5)
1965 (N=144)	1.9	2.1	2.6	(0.0-3.5)
1966 (N=166)	2.1	2.4	2.7	(0.0-3.5)
Grade 2 – Test A (ceiling 3.5)				
(Time of Testing: 2.7)				
1963 (N=148)	2.3	2.8	3.3	(0.0-3.5)
1964 (N=143)	2.8	3.1	3.4	(1.7-3.5)
1965 (N=146)	2.7	3.2	3.4	(1.9-3.5)
1966 (N=125)	2.9	3.3	3.5	(2.3-3.5)
Grade 2 – Test B (ceiling 4.2)				
(Time of Testing: 2.9)				
1963 (Not given)				
1964 (N=136)	2.6	3.2	3.7	(0.0-4.2)
1965 (N=141)	2.3	3.1	3.7	(0.0-4.2)
1966 (N=121)	2.8	3.7	3.9	(0.0-4.2)

Results on Test A have been fairly consistent in grade one since the introduction of the program with some indications of progress as the program has become increasingly well-established. Median grade equivalent scores have been somewhat higher than the norms for the end of first year, ranging from 2.1 to 2.4. The third, or top, quartile scores of 2.6 or 2.7 show that 25 per cent of the children have been achieving, by the end of the first year, above the norm for the middle of second grade. The grade equivalent score marking the first, or lowest, quartile each year was just about at the norm for the end of grade one with some rise noted for the year 1966.

Children in grade two were also given the *New York Tests of Growth*

in Reading Test A each year. The median scores showed continuous improvement and have surpassed the norms for the end of the second grade. The performance of children at the lowest end of the range has been brought up, and the current first quartile scores approximate the norm median level. Since many children achieved the ceiling score on Test A (3.5), the entire Grade was given the more difficult *New York Tests of Growth in Reading Test B.* Here the higher achievers had an opportunity to demonstrate their superior reading ability, resulting in a grade equivalent of 3.9 at the third quartile for the most recent year and 3.7 in the previous years. In 1966, the median score for Test B (3.7) also exceeded the ceiling for Test A.

Table 3 presents the grade equivalent quartiles for the two sub-tests of the *Metropolitan Achievement Test* given to children in grade two in May, 1966. This test does not provide for one overall score as the New York Tests do, but it can be seen that the median score was at grade level for Reading (2.8) and somewhat higher for Word Knowledge (3.1). Again the upper group of children, with the higher ceiling afforded on this test, performed well enough to achieve a third quartile score which is equivalent to a year or more above grade level. There is some indication that the slower readers may find the format of this test more difficult than the New York Tests.

In interpreting the reported test results, it should be borne in mind that these were achieved despite the fact that the school is subject to typical problems of high teacher and pupil mobility found in disadvantaged urban areas. Also, most children start out with a relatively meager background for learning. For example, the median score of the first grade, tested in the Fall of 1965 on the *New York State Readiness Tests* (1965) fell at the 26th percentile, with the first quartile at the 13th percentile and the third quartile at the 47th percentile of the normative population. Despite the low distribution of readiness scores, when the same children were tested at the end of grade one in 1966, over three-fourths of them scored above grade level. (See Table 2.)

*Table 3 Results of Metropolitan Achievement Test, upper primary reading test, form C end of grade 2, 1966**
(N=122)

Sub-test	Grade Equivalent Quartiles			
	Q_1	Median	Q_3	Range
Word Knowledge (ceiling 6.0)	2.4	3.1	4.1	(1.8-6.0)
Reading (ceiling 8.5)	2.3	2.8	3.8	(1.8-5.5)

*Time of testing: 2.8

It is, of course, necessary to exercise caution in making comparisons from one test to another, even within the same battery, and to keep in mind the variability and limitations of formal test scores. In summary, however, it seems clear that the results of the standardized tests have

been encouraging, comparing favorably with published norms rather than falling below them as is so often observed in depressed areas.

Conclusion

The preceding account of beginning reading at Finley School has attempted to describe some of the facets of the program. One would anticipate that the diverse approaches to instruction; the emphasis on oral language development; the great variation allowed for in both levels and rates of learning; the interrelationship of reading with other curriculum areas and classroom activities; the encouragement of individual responsibility; the frequent evaluations; and intensive pupil, teacher and parent involvement should all contribute to greater progress for each child. Experience with the program thus far indicates that the goals are being realized.

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